

Metro-Region

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Watchdog group hears report on Marion Superfund cleanup

BY KELLY BARTH

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FAIRMONT — The community liaison panel that will be looking out for the public in the toxic-waste cleanup of the former Sharon Steel property organized Tuesday for what will likely be a long road ahead.

About 30 panel members and the same number of other interested parties got together at the Circle W Club, not far from where the cleanup is taking place.

Exxon, the new owner of the Superfund site, wants to work with the state Division of Environmental Protection and the federal Environmental Protection Agency to redevelop the 107 acres.

The EPA spent \$7 million to remove hazardous waste from the land, off Lafayette Street, in East Fairmont. Part of that work was to redesign the drainage pattern to confine any contaminated water to the property.

The next step is determining what else needs to be done to make

the property safe for retail, recreational or light industrial use.

Art Chin, toxicologist and technical project manager for Exxon, said the first order of business will be demolishing buildings, a phase expected to take up to three years.

Within the next few weeks, 2 miles of security fencing will be installed and samples of soil collected. The field work will take about a month, Chin said.

The time table for the rest of the cleanup is unknown. Chin said it's far too early to determine that.

But EPA project manager Melissa Whittington said the panel could have some idea of the potential problems at the site and possible solutions by the end of the year.

Exxon executive Don Esch said his company has no plans to retain ownership of the property after the cleanup is done.

The company bought the property because it is liable, in part, for some of the hazardous waste dumped there when Standard Oil owned a

coke plant there during World War I. Esch said property is one of 98 sites around the United States where Exxon is doing remedial work.

"We're going to try to make this a model site," Esch said. "We are going to listen to you."

A shopping mall has been discussed as one of the possible uses for the property. "We don't think we're going to put a day care center there or have it be residential," Whittington said.

Esch said many former Superfund sites are now golf courses.

The liaison panel decided Tuesday that it will meet the first Thursday of each month, at 5:30 p.m., for two hours, with the public invited. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Aug. 6.

There also is an information hotline for people who want to keep up with the progress at the site. The number: 1-800-250-3868. Work documents pertaining to the project will be available at the Marion County Public Library.

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